Introduction

Teaching assessment can be a pain. But it can also be an opportunity. This poster describes my experience with student course evaluations and the development of a supplemental evaluation tool.

I teach two courses required for the college’s general education curriculum: Western Civilization and the Environment, and Natural Resources in American History. Enrollment for both courses consists primarily of freshmen and sophomores, and averages two hundred and fifty students per academic year. My position is tenure-track Instructor, with an eighty percent teaching allocation. Thus, teaching evaluations are a particularly important component of my promotion and tenure review.

Over the last five academic years, my evaluations have ranged from an overall mean of 3.0 to 4.1, averaging 3.8, on a scale from one to five with five being most positive. While some may perceive these numbers as acceptable, given that these are large required courses, others may feel that these are not high scores. There is little opportunity for comparison because teaching evaluation scores for other faculty are available only during the promotion and tenure process when faculty provide documentation for departmental review and comment. Nor are comparative numbers for other general education courses, or large lecture courses, available.

My department Chair suggested that I collect additional data to address the overall mean of my evaluations. This would be included in my promotion and tenure review documentation and demonstrate awareness of and attention to assessment. I analyzed the results of the college surveys over eight semesters, spring 2002 to fall 2005. I found that the questions receiving the lowest mean scores addressed motivation (mean 3.4), fairness of tests and assignments (mean 3.4), and fairness of grading (mean 3.3).

The Value of Information

I gathered valuable data from my new surveys in the 2006/2007 academic year as shown in the table at right. There are four sets of results: data from each of my two courses over two semesters. First, I learned that students perceive lectures positively. My supplemental surveys also revealed that it was not the exam grades with which students were dissatisfied. Valuable, though perhaps disheartening, were the responses to reading for class preparation. These data led me to create a new assignment to compel students to read and analyze the text. I also scheduled class sessions for discussion of the text.

Conclusion… Or… the Real Pain

Once I developed the new surveys, my next task was to have standard bubble forms printed to enable computer processing. The Outreach office, which coordinates administration and processing of the college surveys, directed me to the printing vendor with whom we have a State contract. The final cost was just under $700 for 1,000 forms.

I happily received my new forms just in time for the end of the spring semester of 2007. I administered them to my classes and delivered them to the Outreach office with the college evaluations. And then I was informed my new forms could not be processed. In order to have these surveys processed, the office would need an account number to charge my department. The cost would be a few hundred dollars. In the end, I have very expensive and beautiful survey forms that get manually processed by the department’s administrative assistant, who enters the numbers from the bubble sheets into an Excel spreadsheet.

Still, I have valuable information about my courses and my teaching, not only for promotion and tenure documentation, but for continuous course improvement. The pain was minor, and could be labeled not professional, but rather institutional.

Required Standard Course Evaluations

At my institution, standard end-of-course evaluations are administered to all courses. Students respond to ten questions on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). The questions include the following:

• Organization of course and subject matter
• Effective communication by instructor
• Instructor’s enthusiasm for teaching, knowledge about subject
• Instructor’s positive attitude toward students
• Fairness of tests, assignments, and projects; Fairness of grading
• Motivation of student to do best work
• Student’s best effort in course

Supplemental Evaluations

Supplemental evaluations, administered either at mid-term, or at the end of the semester, can enhance understanding and guide course improvement by measuring student perceptions of course texts, assignments, and the effectiveness of various teaching tools. Students respond on the same five point scale. Example questions include the following:

• The ___ reading was helpful for learning the material
• Lectures were helpful for learning the material
• The ___ assignment was an effective teaching and learning tool

In the fall of 2006, I revised my supplemental evaluations by adding questions to address the low scores in the standard evaluations. In addition to those in the chart below, I asked the following:

• I asked questions/sought help when I did not understand concepts or assignments
• This course requires too much work for a required GenEd course
• I feel this course was a positive addition to my college education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Source and Question</th>
<th>Mean Responses</th>
<th>F’06</th>
<th>F’06</th>
<th>S’07</th>
<th>S’07</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supplemental: “lectures were helpful for learning”</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard: “grading was fair”</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supplemental: “exams were fair”</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplemental: “I completed the reading assignments”</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplemental: “I usually complete reading assignments for most of my other courses”</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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